

"To promote understanding and appreciation of the religious and spiritual values which abide in the processes and relationships of agriculture and rural life; to define their significance and relate them to the Christian enterprise at home and abroad."

The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

Published by The Christian Rural Fellowship, Room 1201, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Number 5

October 1935

Declaration of Dependence Upon the Soil

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The Right of Self-Maintenance*

When in the course of the life of a Nation, its people become neglectful of the laws of nature and of nature's God, so that their very existence is put in peril, necessity impels them to turn to the soil in order to recover the right of self-maintenance.

These truths have long been self-evident, that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These rights constitute the inspiration of that immortal proclamation, the Declaration of Independence. But they are no longer sufficient. Now, as part of the Divine Order of things, man is inspired to re-emphasize as additional thereto--the right of self-maintenance.

In order to enjoy and to hold secure this latter right, man must recognize that his basic sustenance issues from the soil and not from merchants' shelves; that, whenever industrial centralization causes harmful human congestion, and becomes destructive of the right of self-maintenance, man must turn again to the soil from which all new wealth springs except that from fisheries and mines. Otherwise the right of self-government cannot endure.

There are those who look with little favor upon this remedy for the evils of the day. They point to the distress that for more than a decade has plagued those who follow rural occupation. They contend there is already an unusable surplus of the fruits of the soil. They emphasize the reduction in domestic consumption and the shrinkage in foreign markets. With candor they submit that of recent years, certain major foreign nations have added vastly to their planted areas and therefore have become self-sufficient or else, for reasons of political economy, they have shifted their source of supply of certain staple commodities from this country to other regions of the world.

For these reasons and because of the domestic surplus thus created, the farmer, in recent years, has been compelled to follow a policy of reducing his crops as an emergency measure.

To those whose patient sufferance on the farm deserves tribute; to those whose fortitude during enforced idleness in urban centers commands praise; and to those whose arduous labor in public affairs is commended; there is submitted this additional remedy which will enable man once again to enjoy the full fruits of his productive labor.

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Through the timely unfolding of nature's laws, modern science has placed new tools in the hands of man which enable a variety of surplus products of the soil to be transformed through organic chemistry into raw materials usable in industry. No bounds can be set on the markets for such materials. The basic research has progressed sufficiently for the commercial application to begin without delay. Here lies a new frontier to conquer that challenges the genius of science, the courage of private industry and the productive capacity of agriculture.

It is nature's plan. Other than funds for continued research, it demands no appropriations from public treasury. On the other hand, it will create new taxable wealth. It requires little new legislation. It depends upon individual initiative and sweat of the brow. It permits the farmer to enjoy the constitutional privilege of tilling his acres as he will; earning what he can; saving what he may; and being protected in his savings. It will restore the purchasing power of the farmer and increase his consumption of manufactured products. In so doing it will create new work for idle hands to do, thus reviving American industry and American labor.

It is the answer to the nation's economic distress for two reasons:

First, witness the fact that with rare exceptions, for over a generation the gross income of the farmer has been almost identical with the sum total of direct factory payrolls for labor in the city. Except for taxes, interest and insurance, practically all of the farmer's income is spent for the products of the city. The less he has to spend, the less the city sells, which in turn decreases the opportunity for employment of labor in industry. Restore the farmer's income to a normal basis and the wheels of industry will be taxed to capacity to supply his needs and the needs of the unemployed, thus returned to the ranks of productive enterprise.

Second, the history of past depressions discloses that they finally terminate and are followed by a return to prosperity because of two things; namely, expanding markets for old industries and the creation of new industries. In this depression, through causes beyond control, certain past markets no longer exist. It is providential that this plan not only will replace with new markets the past markets that are gone but will also aid in the establishment of new industries, the most important of which is chemistry on the farm.

Early civilizations contribute an old definition for this new work of man. The two words, "chemistry" and "ergon" or work, from the fount of knowledge of ancient Greece, when combined through elision coin the new word "Chemurgic."

The genesis of progress from now on is the "Farm Chemurgic." It will enable the tiller of the soil to do much of the initial processing on his own farm, thus adding to the value of his product in the public place. As a source of supply, it will enable man to depend more upon current income from the soil and to draw less of his capital from beneath the soil, thus preserving a fair share of the treasures of nature's house for future generations.

There are those who will contend that this new domestic source of supply of materials for industry will reduce imports from certain foreign countries, thus decreasing their purchasing power and in turn decreasing their consumption of export products from this country. In certain specific instances, this will occur, but only temporarily. It is submitted that domestic well-being must be restored before foreign trade will flourish on a sound basis. Man's first duty, when he can, is to provide from gifts of nature close at hand the prime requisites of human life; food, shelter and raiment. Having thus first recaptured the right of self-maintenance, then in the natural order of things, confidence in himself and in life itself is restored; a plus above the bare necessities begins to accumulate; his desire for conveniences, luxuries and abundance which add wholesome flavor to his existence, demands satisfaction; and the markets in the most remote corners of the world become a bargaining counter for his commerce. It is submitted that thus, and thus alone, can foreign trade be restored on an enduring basis.

There are those who will contend that these new uses of the surplus of the farm will curtail the market for the products of certain existing domestic industries. Let them be reminded that this is no emergency measure that will perform miracles. It is a plan that must develop in persistent and in orderly fashion over a span of years. Therein lies its strength. Emergency measures never endure for long.

Let those who are thus in opposition extend their horizons beyond the evening of the day and appreciate the benefits that will accrue to their respective enterprises when normal prosperity is again restored to fifty millions of citizens who occupy the farms and the villages and towns adjacent thereto. If they are willing to surrender temporary passing advantage for the common welfare of all, then let them reconsider the name of the twelve million American youths who, having reached maturity since the depression began, are still puzzled as to the meaning of a life which affords them no opportunity for honest work.

These are perilous days that call for high accomplishment. Men and women of this generation will determine the destiny of this nation. Their foremost task is to profit from the evils of the past and make the future more secure for those who follow after them. If they make this their very own true philosophy of life, no power on earth can destroy the fine heritage of citizenship which was theirs when they were born, and that heritage their sons and daughters have the right to share.

We, therefore, as representatives of Agriculture, Industry and Science in convention assembled, having realized that we are but tenants and transients on this earth, and appealing to the Supreme Judge of the human experience, solemnly publish and declare "Man's Dependence Upon the Soil and Man's Inalienable Right to Self-Maintenance." And, for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection and approval of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other and to our country, our talents and our devotion to the high accomplishment of the purpose herein set forth.

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Done in the United States of America, at Dearborn, Michigan, under the shadow of a replica of Independence Hall, on the seventh day of May, in this, the year of our Lord, nineteen hundred thirty-five.